Epics on Innocent Boyhood

P.M. Sakina “Concept of heroism in the selected novels of Mark Twain and R.K. Narayan” Thesis. Department of English, University of Calicut, 2005
Boyhood and its problems have always been a favourite theme of many great writers. Both Twain and Narayan have been able to hold a prominent seat in the literary arena with their authentic narratives of boyhood. The story of an urchin undertaking deeds of heroism that could turn the wheel of fortune has had a wonderful and everlasting appeal to the reading public. The adventures of young heroes have been considered the most readable ones. We have innumerable number of folktales and legends about an unpromising brother or sister who happens to reap success at the end of an enterprise, which prompts Van Wyck Brooks, the famous American critic, to refer to American Literature as a "literature of boys" (The Writer in America 69).

The universal acceptability of such stories suggests that "it satisfies a psychological need common to all men" (Regan, Unpromising Heroes 10) -- their desire to see someone performing heroic acts. The world of children being a microcosm of the adult's, the psychological pleasure derived from such acts is not less. Twain, familiar with the folk stories of his country, found
himself fascinated by the unpromising hero motif perceived in many of those stories. Twain himself, personally, was one who had a dream of success, the realisation of which had been the objective of his long and eventful life. Childhood being the first stage in a man’s life, the present study has chosen the treatment of heroism of the juvenile protagonists in the works of Twain and Narayan as its first point of consideration. Needless to say, both these writers have earned the reputation for the dexterity they have shown in the delineation of the child heroes. These child-heroes are motivated by a dream of success, though many of Narayan’s heroes fail to achieve this. However, Twain’s juvenile protagonists are luckier, as they have a taste of success, sometime or the other. We have the parallel stories of Swami and Tom Sawyer to begin with. Haydn Moor Williams observes that in reading Swami and Friends we are reminded at times of Twain’s Tom Sawyer or any schoolboy, East or West: the eternal hostility of schoolmasters, the vagaries of parents, the rivalry of cricket, the pain of growing up (95).

Malgudi and St. Petersburg have numerous urchins who are good at heart, and who, in all sincerity, would like to imitate the adult world. The problems and their solutions are the constant worry of these children who,
otherwise, lead a gleeful life in the favourite idylls of the two authors. We have a long list of boys and girls whose story reminds us, with a sense of nostalgia, of our own past. Huck and Tom may be Americans, but their attitude to life is shared by the Indian counterpart Swami. Chandran, in The Bachelor of Arts is just a grown-up Swami. Swami leads an uneventful life in the company of his parents and grandmother. A meek and complacent boy like Swami cannot naturally be expected to perform miraculous deeds because his world is confined to his family and school. At home he is a naughty boy, who does not give much heed to studies. He is the darling of his grandmother. At school, he is always in and out of trouble.

Swami has a cherished vision of himself as “Tate”, one of the best bowlers of the world, for the fulfilment of which, he is ready to do anything. His decampment was carried out with a definite heroic plan in his mind -- to come back at the right time to bring laurels to Malgudi Cricket Club. He wanted to please and surprise Rajam, his bosom friend, whose sophistication and intelligence had always been a point of admiration for the submissive Swami. He makes frantic attempts to get enough practice, in vain. Even when he escapes to the forest, he is brought back home, and by then, he has already
lost his opportunity to bring success to his team. He is disillusioned and saddened by the sudden coldness in Rajam and Mani, for whom, Swami is a cheat of the first order.

Twain, on the other hand, is more concerned about how his child heroes act and react within the strict structure of nineteenth century America. The story of Prince Edward and poor Tom Canty (The Prince and the Pauper) takes us to a world of innocent boys who are overtaken by unexpected events. Tom is a dreamer and a romantic in his own fashion. He imitates the royalty; he is the "prince" of rags, with an endless desire to experience the pleasures offered by aristocracy. Later, when he is mistaken for the Prince, he enjoys the situation at first, but is baffled at the kind of restricted life of a prince and longs to leave the palace. If Tom Sawyer's greatest dream is that of glory, Huck's and Tom Canty's is that of freedom. Even that is denied when Tom Canty becomes a member of the royal family. Edward, on the other hand, at Offal Court, acts like a prince. The depiction of Tom's innocence is so captivating and convincing when we see him using the Royal Stamp to crack a nut. It is as if Twain were pronouncing an eternal truth that innocence can have no affectation, in spite of the growing pessimism in his own life.
The same feeling is again found at work in *The Mysterious Stranger*. Little Satan’s act of creating a tribe of little men before the boys excites them. But his act of annihilation of the same as if they were no more than ants shocks them. He declares to the children that men are definitely inferior to angels because they possess the so-called virtue of “moral sense” (60). Little Satan’s words about man and his moral sense confuse the children and they seek a clarification from Father Peter, who explains to them that it is the faculty which enables one to distinguish good from evil. Furthermore, Theodore is given to understand that it is very valuable and that it is the only thing that lifts man above the level of beasts and that it makes him heir to immortality. There is a loss of innocence hinted at in this novel, which is inevitable in the life of any child.

“Of all the urges in man, the urge to be conspicuous is the most human of human traits,” thus observes Regan (*Unpromising Heroes* 10). Tom Sawyer has an evident inclination for self-advertising, and his actions are always motivated by a desire for popularity and recognition. All child psychologists opine that during the adolescent period each child craves for recognition. But this craving is more dominant in Tom than in his intelligent and obedient half-
brother, Sidney. The adolescent boys of Twain and Narayan share all the qualities of children everywhere. They are loveable, and at times adorable, when they open up a world of innocence and mischief, attacking the pretensions of the grown-ups around them. It is when they come into contact with the mercenary and selfish world of the adults that, they tend to lose their innocence. Tom, Huck, Edward, Tom Canty and the whole group of urchins of St. Petersburg are innocent children like Swami, Mani, Rajam, Samuel (Swami and Friends) and Leela (The English Teacher).

Swami’s desire for growth and his futile attempts to raise himself from the position of the average is the story of Narayan’s novel, Swami and Friends. Swami, like his friend Samuel the Pea, is just an ordinary boy, who has no "outstanding virtue of muscle or intellect; who is as apprehensive, weak and nervous about things" (Swami and Friends 9). No wonder, all his attempts at heroism are found to be fruitless. He is doomed to be disillusioned at the end, standing all alone on the railway platform. But this disillusionment becomes an initiation into maturity.

Most of the juvenile heroes in Twain and Narayan are witty and intelligent in everything except in their studies. Swami, like Tom Sawyer, is confronted
with the problem of getting into the "Monday mood of work and discipline," (Swami and Friends 3) after the delicious freedom of Saturday and Sunday. Swami “shuddered at the very thought of school; that dismal yellow building; the fire-eyed Vedanayagam, his class teacher, and the Head Master with his long cane”. Tom Sawyer is also equally unhappy at the thought of school. He is heroic enough to act sick and scare Aunt Polly just to evade school, but is caught by her. Monday morning always found him miserable as "it began another week's slow suffering in school. He generally began that day wishing he had had no intervening holiday. It made the going into captivity and fetters again so much more odious" (MT 33).

Swami is not much different. He goes to the extent of approaching a doctor complaining of delirium, so that he could be freed from school early in the afternoon and goes on to explain delirium as “some kind of stomachache” (Swami and Friends 141). We have a similar incident in Huckleberry Finn where Huck tells Miss Susan that Miss Mary Jane has gone to the Proctors because Hanner was seriously ill and might not last many hours, because she was suffering from "Mumps." He is ready with a clarification on the disease and argues that these mumps are of different kind as they are mixed up with
"measles and whooping-cough, and erysipelas and consumption, and yaller janders, and brain fever" (MT 258).

However, the boys' world is not always full of happiness and gaiety. They do have real issues, though, many of them appear trivial before the adult eye. But, to children like Swami or Tom Sawyer, they are the most confusing ones. Consequently, in Twain and Narayan, the Wordsworthian concept of the child being the father of man finds expression. The world of children has its own heroes. They have a code of rules to be followed too. It is simply not a world of unruly and uncouth boys and girls enjoying unlimited freedom. Just as adults have their own inhibitions, children too have periods of turmoil in their lives.

The problem of going to school and adhering to the custom-bound life is the first hurdle that a boy faces, whether it is in America or in India. As a result, absconding becomes an essential part of these boys' lives, and, undoubtedly, both Swami and Tom are experts in it. Needless to say, playing truant requires a certain amount of courage. Tom is a veteran compared to Swami in this field and no cross-examination on the part of Aunt Polly is successful in trapping him, whereas Swami is always caught. Swami is greatly
influenced by Mani, the vagabond and the most powerful boy in his class and by Rajam, the intelligent and sophisticated one. The diffident and reticent Swami tries to be more adventurous than Mani and more sophisticated and snobbish than Rajam. Both Tom and Swami are confronted by difficulties at school, which to a large extent, are due to their unwillingness to adhere to the custom-bound life in school. Huck, on the other hand, hates all types of education that could be received from a school, as he is essentially a product of nature. He is allowed to learn his lessons directly from nature and the greatest lesson he learns is the lesson in compassion and benevolence.

Comparisons between Swami and Huck have gone a long way ever since Narayan’s boy-hero was noticed by the readers and critics alike. In fact, Swami has been considered a Hindu counterpart of the archetypal adolescent, Huck Finn. Though hailing from entirely different backgrounds they have even the same contempt for etiquette. But unlike Huck’s, most of Swami’s difficulties stem from schools, schoolmasters and the necessity of passing exams. Swami’s anti-school demonstration and the minor escapade towards the close of the novel are the results of the natural spirit of nonconformity possessed by Swami. It is not his interest in politics that instigates Swami to burn his homemade cap,
mistaking it for foreign cloth, but his spirit of adventure and the capacity to question authority. He participates in the hartal after Gandhi's imprisonment - an incident that proves how rebellious even a decent and amicable boy like Swami can be -- given the liberty to act as he wishes. It is Swami who shouts, "We will spit on the police," (9). A mere mention of the word "police" enrages him and so when the "pandemonium started, he was behind no one in destroying the school furniture." The diffident Swami is no longer there, but he assumes the posture of a grown-up, capable of reaction against the British rule. Rajam once exclaims "What a boy you are! You are always in some trouble or other whereever you go, always always!" (Swami and Friends 149).

Swami's heroism begins and ends with his experiences in different schools. He has only one constant aim in life -- to get as much practice as possible, so that he could lead Malgudi Cricket Club to victory. This, ultimately, ends up in his running away, and the consequent starvation in the forest. Even while he is starving in the Mempi forest, he has a vision of himself as a fiery opening bowler entrusted with the task of skittling the opponents' team out. It is with this intention he decides to leave Malgudi for the time being and to come back for a few hours on the day of the match,
disappear once again, and never come back to Malgudi -- a place which contained his father, a stern stubborn father, and that tyrant of a headmaster (Swami and Friends 150).

There is an evident communication gap between the modern youth of the world of Narayan and their parents. Mali in The Vendor of Sweets, Balu in The Financial Expert, and Tim in The World of Nagaraj are victims of this. They believe themselves to be better than their parents, who, to them, are epitomes of traditionalism and conventionality. In Swami and Friends also there is a reference to the younger generation's abhorrence of the ignorance of their elders. Narayan offers us an amusing sketch describing Swami's excessive admiration for the cricketers. Swami talks excitedly of "Tate" to his grandmother.

"What is Tate?", she asked innocently.

Swaminathan's disappointment was two-fold. She had not known anything of his new title, and failed to understand its rich significance even when told. At other times he would have shouted at her. But now he was a fresh penitent and so asked her kindly "Do you mean to say that you don't know Tate?"

(Swami and Friends 127)
This gives him an opportunity to deliver a lecture on cricket and on Tate, posing as an important and authoritative person. But he loses his bravado, the moment his father enters the room, giving way to humiliating awkwardness.

Huck’s case is not much different from Swami’s. He decides to leave St. Petersburg not because he hates the place, but because he hates the civilizing efforts of the widow and Miss Watson. Likewise, Tom also absconds just to hurt Beckie, his girlfriend. He even thinks of the effect it would create on Becky thus:

What if he turned his back, now and disappeared mysteriously?
What if he went away -- ever so far away, into unknown countries beyond the seas -- and never come back anymore!
How would she feel then? (MT 44).

Another aspect of the adolescent heroism seen in Twain and Narayan is the children’s tendency to leave home in search of new lands. Swami (Swami and Friends), Chandran (The Bachelor of Arts), Huck (Huckleberry Finn), Tom and Joe Harper (Tom Sawyer) have a period of separation from home. Joe Harper, perhaps, has the silliest of reasons to leave his home, protesting
against his mother’s whipping him for having consumed some cream without her permission, which, in reality, he had not even tasted. Joe’s tender mind gets bruised and he decides to leave the place so as to punish his mother and hopes, “she would be happy and never regret having driven her poor boy out into the unfeeling world to suffer and die” (MT 61). But these capers make them realise the real value of the security and warmth of their homes. The call from a world of unbounded liberty and eternal joy appears dull for them and they are torn by a desire to go back. It is Joe Harper who decides first to return to see his mother. He is brave enough to admit it to the others. “Yes, I want to see my mother and you would too, if you had one. I ain’t any more baby than you are” (MT 72). To his great surprise, Tom finds that even Huck, who never really had any attachment to anybody at home, wanted to go back to the familiarity of St. Petersburg.

In the first part of his escapade, Swami is excited over the prospect of eating all the divine sweets made in the Bombay Ananda Bhavan, if at all he could get there. Mempi forest would have looked as attractive as Jackson’s Island if only Swami had company. The writers under reference seem to believe that the rebelliousness in the young is just a passing phase in the process
of growing up. The story of these young heroes illustrates the fact that the process of growing up is challenging, and at the same time, painful, for adolescence is a period of turbulence and confusion for any girl or boy.

Undoubtedly, every adolescent suffers from some sort of frustrations in the human family, the signs of which may not be quite apparent in many cases, but they do exist. A return to normalcy and warmth of the familiar surroundings of home is inevitable in the lives of these absconders. Swami, Chandran, Tom, Huck, Joe -- all go back to their homes. Indeed, all of them are happy to be there. This period of separation from home, in fact, serves another purpose -- it makes them realise the value of relationships and family ties, except, perhaps, for Huck Finn. In Tom Sawyer, Twain makes the children come back to a world of happiness and affection, but in Huckleberry Finn, Huck is allowed "to light out for the territory" (MT 317). Possibly, Twain himself could not have bridled Huck's wild desire for unlimited freedom and hence this deviation.

When we come to The Bachelor of Arts, we are introduced to a slightly more mature atmosphere of diversion inside the college campus. There is nothing extraordinary about Chandran. But his friend, Veeraswami, who is an
intellectual extrovert, attracts us with his original and revolutionary ideas. Narayan says that Veeraswami’s life itself was a preparation for him to achieve higher ideals of eradicating the English from the Indian soil. Imperialism being his favourite demon, he believed in "smuggling arms into the country, and on a given day, shooting all the Englishmen; he assured Chandran that he was even then preparing for that great work. His education, sleep, contacts, and everything were a preparation" (Bachelor of Arts 46).

This, evidently, is an expression of heroism from the point of view of a young adult, who is capable of independent thinking. The political consciousness of the college boy makes him bold enough to disclose his secret dream. The boys of Malgudi cannot be expected to perform more forcefully than this, for, they, like their elders, are not at war with the quiet life of Malgudi. Moreover, real acts of heroism are very rare in the world and so are heroes. The children of Malgudi cannot be like Huck who decides to set out for the territory, disregarding the civilized life and the comfort and security of St. Petersburg. No wonder, we tend to think that the characters of Twain have more Life Force in them, to borrow the term used by Bernard Shaw. In The Bachelor of Arts, Chandran leaves Malgudi as a result of the star-crossed horoscope.
He leaves home to become a sanyasi like Joe Harper, who has a similar desire to become a hermit after getting beaten up by his mother. To Chandran, life itself seems to have come to a standstill at the prospect of the cancellation of his wedding to Malathi, whose horoscope does not match with his. People with ill-matched horoscopes cannot marry, according to Hindu custom.

Chandran is prepared to disregard these beliefs, but finds himself in the shackles of customs from which he cannot tear himself off. Consequently, he leaves home, treads the hitherto untrodden paths of life -- the life of detachment and renunciation of a sanyasi. It is almost like an act of vengeance on the part of Chandran to whom the only thing possible, apart from committing suicide, is to become a recluse. He feels "he had done with the gamble of life. He was beaten. He could not go on living. With Malathi married and gone" *(Bachelor of Arts 102).* When he longs for coffee, he derives a sort of pleasure watching a part of him suffer acutely, saying: "Go on: suffer and be miserable. You were not sent into this world to enjoy. Go on: be miserable and perish"(107). Gradually, he realises the folly of the whole act. He sends home a letter demanding some money, and eventually returns home, like Swami from the Mempi forest. He further comprehends that his mind is not yet ripe for entering
the last and the most important ashrama of life of a true Hindu -- Sanyasa. For him, grihastha ashrama is to be the next step and he eventually prepares himself for it, because he has to "cross the shadow line between carefree youth and responsible manhood" (Harrex, The Fire and The Offering 57).

But this sort of home-coming is not what Twain would want in his world, he, being an advocate of liberty and adventure. As mentioned earlier, in The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, Tom and Huck go back home, not to remain there, but to undertake a longer and more significant journey, of which we are told in The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. Twain’s America was an industrialized, commercialized and modernized nation with an assorted race, that was always engaged in a rat race for power and wealth. He could not be blind to American life and so the picaresque heroes of his much acclaimed works reflect the peculiarity of the American life of the time. They project rebellious young men, who, at times, are victims of indecision and inner conflicts. The adventures of Tom and Huck show a conflict between the assumptions of democracy and its limitations; on another level, a conflict between the ideal of freedom and the nature of man. Twain’s heroes always possess a robust virility that refuses to conform. To quote Henry Nash Smith:
Huck's story is a story of movement -- The outcome of each episode in his story is a renewed flight from Jackson's Island, where he and Jim fear, will be found by slave hunters; from the wrecked steamboat Walter Scott in midriver on which they encounter a band of robbers and murderers -- this pattern of repeated movement has characterized American history from the beginning. (The American Novel 71)

All hypocrisy exasperates Twain and his heroes. Both Tom and Huck feel that it is difficult to throw off the burden of conformity in the village. The community along the Mississippi is oppressed by narrow-minded customs, which find expression in Sunday school exercises where a prize is given to the pupil who has learnt two thousand verses by rote. Tom has no qualms in standing before the assembly producing sufficient tickets to own a Bible, though he has not learnt any of the verses. Tom's only desire here is to be a hero in front of his admirers and his obedient brother Sid. Tom, as always, tries to win acceptance and admiration, through which he hopes to get a place of importance in his society of young urchins of St. Petersburg. Huck, on the other hand, is fed up with the civilizing measures, decides to embark on a journey, though he
has never been outside the little river town of St. Petersburg. But he launches upon a journey that takes him more than a thousand miles downstream, passing a constantly changing panorama of new landscape, strange characters, unforeseen and unimagined dangers. It is during this journey we come face to face with Huck the valiant hero, who had not exhibited any sign of heroism so far. He, to Twain, must have been the prototype of the unpromising hero, who is to bring success in the most unexpected manner later. Bernard De Voto observes that Huck’s flight is a passage through the structure of the nation. It is an exploration of the human race, whose objective needs no explicit recording (Studies in Huck Finn 35).

However, the motive behind the adventurous travel undertaken by Huck and Jim points to one thing -- the desire to escape from the conventions and customs of the everyday American life. Twain was very particular in striking a contrast between the work-a-day reality of the American society and that of the fabulous play-world of the Western frontier. The idea of quitting work, or of a simple walk out, sudden and unexplained, must have had its own charm to a community of speculators and achievers. In fact, Twain himself was an advocate of such a dream. The Innocents Abroad and Roughing It show
the author’s enthusiasm for journeys that take men away from the din and bustle of the world. We have the words of the narrator of *Roughing It* who envies his brother because he coveted not only his distinction and financial splendour but the “long strange journey he was going to make and the curious new world he was going to explore.”(2)

Kenneth. S. Lynn’s view that of all the American writers, Twain is the principal celebrant of the escape dream appears quite meaningful here (Lynn 41). The journey in *Roughing It* is undertaken with an evident light-heartedness and Twain has very aptly chosen the terminology of Paradise while describing Lake Tahoe and the surrounding countryside. To him, "Tahoe’s air is the same as the angel’s breath" (*Roughing It* 15). The narrator and his friend loll in the sand, smoke their pipes and sleep. But he gets tired of staying in one place and he is at a loss for words to describe the “itch” that drives him on. Committed and unsure of himself, the narrator sets off once again in pursuit of adventures. The whole narration depicts the mind of a restless and rebellious character. But, in *Huckleberry Finn*, when Huck embarks on his journey, he has all kinds of fear in his mind. The journey to an unknown world does dampen his spirit, though he finds no other way to get
out of the surroundings he hates. His adventures are not sprung out of heroism, but out of sheer necessity. He has no glorified picture of a picaresque hero in his mind, though we are sure, had it been Tom Sawyer who had undertaken the journey, he would have made it an elaborately glorified affair. Because, glory, to Tom, is his lifeblood.

Tom Sawyer, on the other hand, is always conscious of a rival in his own household -- his own half-brother Sidney. He delights in getting Tom in trouble with Aunt Polly, setting an example of good conduct, which Tom can never attain. He has no adventurous and troublesome ways, and consequently, he remains quite safe when troubles envelop Tom. But as Regan puts it, "Tom, for all his recalcitrance, occupies a higher place in the affection of his aunt (and by implication, of the community) than Sidney does because he possesses, along with his capacity for getting into trouble, an active capacity for courage and human deeds" (Unpromising Heroes 143). Perhaps, this quality in Tom is what Judge Thatcher found attractive in him, for he acts as a father figure to Tom, the orphaned and fatherless boy. Tom "would have liked to fall down and worship him" (MT 29) and he was quite approachable and warm. When Tom is introduced to him, the Judge puts his hand on the boy's head and calls
him "a fine little man." The subsequent, heroism that Tom exhibits in the church inn has a catastrophic end; but Tom is confident that he will win his affection, which becomes true at the end and Judge Thatcher virtually adopts him.

Tom’s heroism, like Swami’s, primarily aims at attention, since both of them yearn to achieve recognition, acceptance, admiration, and a place of importance. Swami tries to get attention by cultivating friendship with Mani, the strong boy, and Rajam, the intelligent one. In fact, these two boys represent what Swami lacks -- physical strength and social recognition. Tom’s intention is to show-off in all possible ways. He has enough confidence in himself, unlike Swami. Tom’s exhibitionism is aimed at a boy-audience and he is the leader of his boy-army and boy-pirates. He shows enough courage in organizing and executing his plans. But we get a glimpse of the boy-hero, when his girl friend Becky is confronted with a dilemma in the classroom. Becky tears Dobbin’s book and Tom happens to witness this. At first he finds satisfaction in observing Becky’s discomfort and he even anticipates the scene of punishment with a kind of positive pleasure. But when he sees her looking like a “helpless rabbit,” a change takes place in his mind and he rises to the occasion heroically
admitting "I done it." (MT 88) This is a selfless act that wins Becky's love. This alone, other than the Muff Potter case, perhaps, is the real act of heroism on the part of Tom. Indeed, he wins applause after this incident as Becky feels indebted to him. Tom goes to sleep that night with Becky's words in his memory, "Tom, how could you be so noble?." (MT 88)

Regan, while discussing the nature of the child protagonists opines that Tom Sawyer's earlier actions really account for his vanity and not his heroism and that even Twain's usage of the word "hero" itself to refer to Tom is ironical (Unpromising Heroes 116). The three pirates on Jackson's Island are referred to as "a vain and boastful company of heroes" (MT 76), and Tom himself is referred to as a "strangling" (MT 60) hero in the episode where he is drenched by a pan of water thrown out by a servant, lying under Becky's window, proposing to die of unrequitted love. Regan again points out that Tom is called "a hero" frequently in the course of his unheroic boyish adventures which occupy the first half of the book; whereas in the second half; in which Tom repeatedly acts mature indeed heroically, the word hero occurs only once (116).

The unfolding of the mystery of the murder of Dr. Robinson provides
Tom with a chance to prove his heroism. He, at last, is celebrated as a hero, and the people of the town really come to understand that Tom undertook the risk of testifying against Injun Joe not out of any hope to win fame, but out of a sense of duty stronger than his own fear. Swami, the Narayan hero, likewise, gets a couple of opportunities to prove his courage, but unfortunately, he is incapable of winning acclamation. He tries to act heroic during the demonstration scene. His last and final act of absconding, to bring laurels to his club, also fails miserably.

Politics is not a forte of the youngsters of Malgudi, unlike the youth of today. It is a western concept to them and the Malgudians try to avoid it with a passion, perhaps, except in Waiting for the Mahatma. In The English Teacher Gajapathy bursts out:

There are times when I wish there was no politics in the world and no one knew who was ruling now. The whole of the West is a muddle owing to its political consciousness and what a pity that East should also follow suit. (42)

The youngsters of Malgudi may go astray, but it is not to embrace politics.
Right from *Swami and Friends*, Narayan seems to believe that politics is not an average man’s game. The grown-ups insist that the youngsters should not have anything to do with politics, especially the students. Swami tries to be heroic in the anti-school strike by breaking the window glasses and when he comes back home, his father asks him: “Why do not you urchins leave politics alone and mind your business? We have enough trouble in our country without you brats messing up things” (*Swami and Friends* 102).

Swami is made to pay heavily for this “messing” up. When he is interrogated by the headmaster and caned by him, Swami’s desperation gives way to courage and "he restrained the tears that were threatening to rush out jumped down, and grasping his books rushed out muttering, 'I don’t care for your dirty school' " (*Swami and Friends* 106).

Unlike in Raja Rao’s *Kanthapura*, where the freedom movement becomes a passionate involvement of an entire community, the movement in this novel touches only the periphery. Swami, in his own way, was trying to carry out his protest against the authority of the school for having punished him unnecessarily. He felt that he was only doing his duty as a sincere cricketer to save his team.
Mani in *Swami and Friends* may be more heroic than Swami himself, because “he monopolised the last bench and slept bravely” (8). To Swami, Mani always towered above all the other boys of the class. "He seldom brought any books to the class and never bothered about homework" (8). Swami acts as his assistant when Mani starts fighting with the other boys after the exams are over. Mani snatches ink-bottles from boys and destroys them in a mood of joviality. The boys who protest against this, were aptly punished by Mani, pouring ink over their clothes. “Overcome by the mood of the hour, he had spontaneously emptied his ink-bottle over his own head and had drawn frightful dark circles under his eyes with the dripping ink” (66).

**Heroism, in the traditional sense, goes hand in hand with religious feeling in Narayan’s world.** Narayan’s child protagonists are all religious, though the whole exercise of religious rituals is ridiculed by the author. Twain’s heroes seem to possess a questioning mentality towards religion, which, in a way, is a trait that they received from their creator. Swami’s ardent desire to see the pebbles converted into money brings a smile even to the most insensitive readers. He has learnt that Gods are capable of doing all kinds of miracles. It is only natural and easy for him to approach the Gods rather than approach
his father who is a stern disciplinarian. He wanted only very little cash to purchase a hoop to play. Gods become his last resort as he remembers Ebenezar's words that God would readily help those who prayed to Him. He enters the "pooja" room and explains the situation to the Gods. He promises to give up biting his thumb if the Gods helped him. He closes his eyes and mutters: "Oh, Sri Rama! Thou hast slain Ravana though he had ten heads, can't You give me six pies?" (70) He fixes a time limit of half an hour for the Gods to perform the miracle. He is infuriated at the indifference of the Gods who did not turn the pebbles into coins. "He wanted to abuse the God, but was afraid. Instead, he vented all his rage on the cardboard box, and kicked it from place to place." (71) Later, he repents, fearing God's wrath and respectfully buries the box at the root of a banana tree. O.P. Saxena remarks that it is these serio-comic reflections which authenticate Narayan's portrayal of children (Glimpses 56).

Twain's Huck too ponders over the possibility of God's miracle in a similar context. In Huckleberry Finn, Huck rejects both heaven and hell, symbols of man's concept of the eternal. He even admits to Miss Watson that he wished he was there in hell as all that he wanted was a change. He does not
cVCN, for a minute, consider the possibility of going to heaven, as it was where Miss Watson too hoped to go. Huck's stream of thought is exactly like Swami's, when he makes up his mind: "I couldn't see no advantage in going where she was going. So I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it" (MT 144). The very same principle of the rejection of heaven is seen, when Huck decides to keep the whereabouts of Nigger Jim, a secret. Though Huck decides to help him, it does not point to his rejection of moral values. He believes in following his own moral code. In fact, he has his fears regarding his impulsive decision. He voices his fears thus: "People would call me a low down Abolitionist and despise me for keeping mum -- but that don't make no difference" (MT 196).

Miss Watson and the widow try to teach Huck of God's mercy. Huck is puzzled. Was God the widow's kind God or Miss Watson's harsh one? He decides to belong to the widow's God if at all He wanted him.

Again, the principles regarding prayer confuse him; like Swami, he thinks about the results of prayer. Huck says to himself: "If a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Winn get back the maney he lost on park? Why can't Miss. Watson fat up?" (149). He sees himself as a bad boy doing bad things but the reader can see him only as a good boy doing good things.
James M. Cox observes thus:

If Huck even begins to think he is doing a good thing by helping Jim, he will become a good boy like Sidney -- one knowingly engaged in virtuous action: or a bad boy like Tom -- one who can seem to go against society because he really knows that he is doing right. (Cox 120)

It is with the least intention to achieve glory that Huck decides to help Jim. To arrive at this decision, it takes a whole world of pain and confusion for him. He believes that he will be sent to Hell for this and prepares himself for that without any hesitation. The peculiarity of Huck's heroism is his apparent ignorance of it. He is, unaware of the fact that he is engaged in a continuous struggle with the values of St.Petersburg because freedom for Huck is not realised in terms of political liberty, but in terms of pleasure.

Having arrived at a decision, he sticks on to it, disregarding its consequences. "The moral code handed down to the generations by their predecessors means nothing to him as his values are based on pure intuition," says Leslie A. Fiedler (133). He has an unpolluted and undisciplined heart,
which is essentially virtuous. Henry Nash Smith makes the following observation: "Mark Twain intends for the reader to identify himself with this part of Huck to feel a thrill of moral exaltation when the ignorant boy decides to go to hell rather than betray his friend" (*The Development of a Writer* 76).

It is the same moral code that perplexes him when Tom offers to help Jim. He just cannot understand Tom coming up with a suggestion to act against the law. He is undecided as to whether he should praise Tom or not, for his impulsive action. Tom has only one objection to Huck's plan- that it was too simple and as mild as "goose-milk" (*MT* 282). He draws up an elaborate plan that involves real acts of bravery. Huck closely follows Tom's plan though an internal debate takes place in his mind as to the moral sanctity of their action. But his conscience is relieved when he realises the truth that Jim is let free by the widow. He is satisfied that his "hero" continues to be respectable. Once the problem of Jim has been settled, Huck only finds it apt to continue his journey. He is at last permitted to "return to his anonymity, to give up the role of a hero, to fall into the background which he prefers, for he is modest in all things and could not well endure the attention and glamour which attend a hero at a book's end," observes Lionel Trilling (7). There is a
moral crisis, of which Huck is not conscious, and this provides the emotional climax of the story.

The Mysterious Stranger illustrates the world of children when they are exposed to the stark realities of life. Philosophical digressions regarding man as the damned species somehow do not look out of place. They fit into the larger context of things elaborated in the novel. Little Satan makes a relentless exposure of the futility of life and the meaninglessness of God. Through the words of Philip Traum, Twain voices his own lack of faith in any established religion. The novel illustrates an evident attack on the concept of God itself, on one level, but on the other, it ridicules the pride of folly and self-deception of mankind. Little Satan's vehement attack on God at the end of the novel, while bidding farewell to Theodore, is full of unveiled anger, anger at a God who created both heaven and hell, a God who created good children and bad children, a God who made unhappy individuals when he could have easily made all of them happy. To him, such a God is not worthy of adoration.

Narayan's child heroes definitely are not involved in such profound and everlasting issues capable of consuming all their mirth and hilarity. They are more relaxed and contented, though Chandran (The Bachelor of Arts), at
times is found to reflect on serious issues like the illusory nature of life. Their
kind of heroism does not call for philosophical musings, except, of course, in a
mocking fashion. Chandran, while watching his college group photo, is nostalgic
and at the same time philosophic.

The same mock-serious treatment is shown while Chandran ponders over
the possibility of being a sanyasi after his disappointment in his first love. But
when the villagers take him for a real sanyasi, he is conscience-stricken, unlike
Raju (The Guide). If the sight of the gifts fetched by the gullible villagers
creates immense pleasure in Raju’s mind, the very same sight gives rise to
moments of extreme agony in Chandran. “The sight of the gifts sent a spear
through his heart, He felt a cad, a fraud, a confidence trickster. These were
gifts for a counterfeit exchange” (The Bachelor of Arts 111).

Huck suffers from a greater moral dilemma, right after his decision to
stand with Jim and to help him out of slavery. Huck is aware of the fact that
slavery is not a crime in America and that helping a slave to the road to
freedom could necessarily be called a crime, for which he will be ridiculed by
society. At first, he writes a letter to Miss Watson informing her of the Negro’s
whereabouts. But he finds it difficult to choose between his desire to follow
the prescribed social code and his equally strong inclination to protect his friend from the slave catchers. At last, after a mental debate he decides: "All right, then, I will go to hell" (MT 195) and tears up the letter. This moment marks his entry into a world of protest -- protest against Negro slavery. "But he comes reluctantly," says James M. Cox, "not gloriously, forward; even as he makes his famous declaration to go to hell, he is looking for a way out. He is certainly not a rebel: he is in a tight place and does the easiest thing." (The Fate of Humour 174). This brilliant observation illustrates the very basis of Huck’s character: his reticence to undertake acts of heroism, just for the sake of heroism. "When he repudiates his own conscience in this way, Huck takes a long step further in his repudiation of Southern Society, which has formed his conscience," observes Frank Baldanza in the essay "The Structure of Huckleberry Finn" (Nineteenth Century Novel 282).

The next issue that unsettles Huck’s happiness is Tom’s evident willingness to help Jim. Huck cannot understand how a civilized boy like Tom could take part in an illegal activity like this. He is satisfied that his companion remains respectable and his unceasing fascination for adventure was the reason for the elaborate arrangements to free Jim. The adventures, thoughts, and emotions
of the boys in *Tom Sawyer* become emblematic of a stage both in the growth of civilization and in the life of any man. The novel faithfully represents two aspects of man -- his romantic conventions and natural religion, which, in turn, are respectively represented by Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. Both are essentially orphans who are allowed to find their new fathers in either society or nature, Tom chooses civilization, while Huck chooses nature. Tom remains within the conventions of the pseudo-Christian society, while Huck shows a total rejection of it. Huck's worship and devotion involve nature, whereas, Tom's are fastened to society. Tom's actions are governed by knowledge, received from books. Whenever he explains any of the intricacies of his chivalric plan, he argues that such actions can always be seen in books.

Huck does not even attend school. For Tom, Huck is a romantic outcast. "In portraying the conscience free Huck, he (Mark Twain) creates an unfettered demigod, free because unentangled by social imperatives," says Jay Martin (*Harvests of Change* 188). Eventually, the boys get the custody of the treasure, but Huck loses his freedom by gaining wealth and respectability.

Tom does not attach much seriousness to religion. Sunday Bible classes are really boring to him. The whole assembly of believers remains scandalised,
despite their inclination to laugh, when the dog incident takes place inside the church. Tom is excited to think that there is some satisfaction about divine service when there is a bit of variety in it. Though he is inclined to take everything lightly, he is over-burdened with uneasiness after the graveyard incident. He gets up late in the morning and feels uneasy over the fact that he was not woken up by anybody. "There was no voice of rebuke and averted eyes and there was the silence and an air of solemnity that strikes a chill to the culprit's heart" (MT 54). The realisation that his heroism has been taken too far makes him dull and sober. He, certainly, would have preferred a flogging by his aunt. Her mute suffering hurts him, and he seeks pardon, promising reform.

The very same code of law is found to operate in The Prince and the Pauper. The prince is not guileful. He agrees to have a change of clothes with the pauper boy, who wants to have a taste of aristocratic life. Though he is punished for this simple game of exchange, he learns much in the course of his miserable life as a pauper. The world of the innocents is guided by their conscience and impulses, which prompts Tom Canty to identify the real heir to the throne. If he had really wished otherwise, he could have had power and
wealth in his hands forever. Unlike the practical and selfish world of the schemers and manipulators, the innocent and simple-minded children are always endowed with conscience. Tom Canty’s repentance is complete when he falls on his knees in front of the real heir in rags and says: "Oh, my Lord the King, let poor Tom Canty be first to swear fealty to thee and say 'put on thy crown and enter into thine own again'" (MT 426). The Prince rises to the occasion offering all sorts of protection to the usurper, declaring him the “King's Ward” (MT 434). The unpromising pauper has had his taste of royalty, whereas, the promising hero Edward, has painfully realised the circumstances in which the poor lived in his own country.

Swami also undergoes an experience comparable to Tom’s apparent disregard for Aunt Polly. Swami neglects his grandmother’s request to buy some lemon for her to cure her stomachache. On his way to the shop, he meets Mani and Rajam playing cricket. The possibility of joining them was too much of a temptation for him. It is only after the departure of both Mani and Rajam, he is reminded of the old lady’s “pathetic upturned face and watery eyes” (Swami and Friends 126). He feels guilty and calls himself "a sneak, a thief, an ingrate and a hardened villain which is a poor substitute for lemons."
What we find common in Swami and Tom is the fact that in both the cases the earlier actions of the heroes are childish whereas the later actions are more mature and manly. The earlier actions are full of trepidation but the later ones are full of courage and heroism. This helps the reader to have a concrete idea of the boy's growth, from childishness to maturity. The same, again, is true with Twain's Prince and Pauper and Narayan's Raju and Chandran.

Such are the boys who inhabit the worlds created by Twain and Narayan. Whether it is St. Petersburg or Jackson's Island or sixth century England or nineteenth century Washoe, the characters that people these novels have become quite familiar to the readers all over the world. It is gratifying to citizens of all nationalities to recapture and recall the pleasure and delight that Twain's and Narayan's works have given the world for decades. The theme of growing-up -- from innocence to experience -- seems to be a matter of common interest to both of them. These epics on boyhood have been welcomed with a rare kind of enthusiasm all over the world. Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn are perhaps the best-known juvenile heroes and Indian Writing in English cannot exist without mentioning Narayan and his adolescent protagonists.

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn have been
prescribed for high school and postgraduate classes alike in many countries.

The immense popularity of Twain is evident from the fact that even in Russia there appears to be a growing tribe of Twainians, as the admirers of the American novelist describe themselves. A production of *Tom Sawyer* was also quite successful in Russia. Vladimir Ilyin writes, in his essay “How Fedya came to be called Tom” thus:

> Not long ago Soviet T.V. viewers saw a film based on Mark Twain’s story, *Tom Sawyer* was played by Moscow pupil Fedya Stukove, and the viewers thought that he was so good in his part that it was difficult to imagine a different Tom. (Ilyin 19)

Needless to say, Narayan also has his child protagonists who have brought great honour to its author. It is with a healthy attitude he tries to understand the children and their likes and dislikes. The juvenile heroes of Narayan show their resentment over discrimination of any kind and a natural hatred for discipline. Child psychology is not at all an equipment that Narayan needs to understand the inner world of his child heroes. He prefers to deal with them as human realities, and not as abstractions, problems, or bundles of psychological activities. Perhaps, the best thing about Narayan’s juvenile heroes is that they
are true to their nature. They have come out of real earth, have real blood in
their veins, and as such, are true to the whole human race. No wonder the
readers all over the world feel themselves to be in direct communion with
someone, whose tastes and attitudes seem identical with their own, a voice
that speaks for them, as well as to them.

An analysis of the juvenile heroes of Twain and Narayan, reveals quite a
few points of similarity in their attitudes: but there are a few other aspects too,
which are worthy of notice that take the Twainian child heroes -- especially
Huck -- to a higher plane. Huck, towards the end of Tom Sawyer, declares
that his attempts to follow the civilised ways of society are a failure. "I have
tried it, and it don't work, Tom. It ain't for me," (MT 138), he says. Such an
earnest and strong negation of the accepted norm of society requires real strength
of character. And Huck has it. But as mentioned earlier, Huck's heroism is
convincing and acceptable because it happens to spring from an innocent mind
that is unmindful of the material benefits he is going to lose with that decision.
Maybe, it is this aspect of heroism that both the writers under discussion
wanted to project through their novels -- that heroism without heroics is the
need of the day.